

HEROD IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

WHEN the experiment of an Infant-School was determined on, in the last generation, the difficulty was how to begin.

Mr. Wilderspin long afterwards told the story of the first day of the first school, except that which had grown up under Mr. Owen, at Lanark. Mr. Wilderspin and his wife had been very unwilling to make such a venture as bringing together a great number of infants, who had never before spent an hour away from their homes or their mothers; but they were at last persuaded. How many arrived we do not remember; but they kept coming and coming; and the mothers took off their hats and bonnets, and kissed them, and left them. The Wilderspains set to work to play with them: and heavy work it was. At last one little creature began to cry aloud. This set another off; the roar spread till every one of the whole assemblage was screaming at the top of its voice. There was nothing to be done—the noise was so great, and the distress so desperate. If this went on till noon—when the mothers were to come—half the children would be exhausted, and almost dead. In despair, the Wilderspains rushed into the next room, and the poor woman threw herself on the bed in tears. Her husband was struck by an unaccountable but most fortunate fancy. A cap of his wife's was hanging up to dry. He stuck it on the top of a pole, and carried it into the school, waving it as he went. Within two minutes every child had stopped crying. Their faces were all wet and blubbered, but they were watching the dancing cap.

We need not pursue the story. The hint of appealing to the eye was taken. The excellent master and mistress thought the morning never would be over; and the afternoon was little better. At night they agreed that they could not possibly go on with it; but, as future generations will know, they did persevere; and their success induced many to take up their work.

Many of our readers may have visited an Infant-School. Some may have visited several. Let them now recall what they saw. They saw, perhaps sixty children in one school; a hundred in another; two hundred in a third; all under five or six years old. Every one of these little creatures was infinitely dear to its parents, who thought that no other baby ever was so winning, so singularly charming; and even to a stranger who watched their movements, there was not one which did not excite interest in its own way. Most of them were alive in every fibre, never still a minute, except the set that were in the cribs; and they were in a rosy sleep, as still as at midnight. Now fancy all these schools united in one: add to them all the collection assembled at the baby-shows we heard of five years since; add to these again all the infants you ever remember to have seen; and then imagine these thousands of infants struck dead, lying—a crowd of corpses—on some wide common (for St. Paul's Cathedral floor would not hold them); conceive of them laid out in rows on the grass, with their little coffins piled in pyramids behind them; and you see but a small part of the murder of the innocents which goes on in England every year. Did you ever think of this before?

The fact is proved that, in England, a hundred thousand persons die needlessly every year; and of this number forty thousand are children under five years of age.

Of all the infants born in England, above forty per cent. die before they are five years old. Yet what creature is so tenacious of life as a baby? Those who know the creature best, say they never despair of an infant's life while it breathes: and most of us have witnessed some recoveries which are called miraculous. There is also no creature so easily manageable as an infant, so easily kept healthy and happy, merely by not interfering with the natural course of things. How, then, can this prodigious amount of killing go on

in a country where infanticide is not an institution?

It is precisely because the natural course of things is interfered with that infants die as they do. Nature provides their first food; and if they do not get it, whose fault is it? The great majority of mothers must be naturally able to nurse their own infants. Poor women do it as a matter of course; and if gentlemen did it as simply and naturally, that one change would largely modify the average of deaths. Gentlewomen may not be aware of this, because the doctor is complaisant in bringing a wet-nurse, and the indolent mother is unaware that her own infant probably suffers, though it does not die, from being put to the wrong breast, while it never enters her head that the nurse's baby probably dies.

If, of the forty per cent. of English infants who die yearly we could know how many are the children of wet-nurses, the fact might startle the fine ladies who suborn the mothers, and might bring no small amount of reproach on the complaisant doctors. When the kind of food is changed, nature is still far from being deferred to as she ought.

Railways are doing good in the article of children's diet. There are still far too many town-cows; but more and more milk is brought in from the country. We remember the spectacle of the brewery cow, shut up all the week in her stable, where, from the effect of full feeding with grains, she soon could not turn round, nor get out till she was shrunk; and of her Sundays when, the gates being closed, she was let out to disport herself among the barrels in the yard. She was a picture of health in comparison with many London cows, which feed hundreds of children. This may, or may not, be better than the state of things when there was no milk to be had for nearly half the children in London: but the race will have no fair chance till there is an abundance of country milk procurable in every town in England.

Modern bread is a great improvement, generally speaking, on that of half a century ago; there are more vegetables, we believe, in proportion to our numbers; not so much meat, we fear, but what there is of a finer quality. In regard to food, the most fatal mischief is, perhaps, the bad cookery,—taking all ranks of society into the account. In many a respectable kitchen, and almost universally in the poor man's dwelling, a large proportion of the nourishing quality of food is lost by injudicious cookery. Other mischiefs in regard to aliment we see every day. We see hungry children, with their spectre eyes and pinched features, and the tell-tale down, like that of a callow bird, on their cheeks. We see infants gnawing at raw apples or carrots, to keep them quiet. We see the children of small shopkeepers, and artisans, and farmers killed with a surfeit of food. We specify those classes, because they, above others, fall into the mistake of cramming themselves and their children, under the notion of living comfortably, doing justice to the children, and so on. The doctors could tell a good deal about the amount of disease in people of all ages,

where it is the habit of the household to eat every two or three hours, and have meat or fish at every meal. Liver complaints and fevers afflict, or carry off, the parents in many such households; and child after child dies of diarrhoea, inflammatory attacks, or actual surfeit. If the food eaten could be divided between the hungry and the over-fed, a noble group of English children would grow up, year by year, to serve and grace society, and enjoy their natural term of life, instead of being missed from the crib, and the little chair at table, and the father's knee in the evening, and the mother's heart through the whole weary day.

So much for interference with nature about food. As to medicine, that may be called an interference with nature in every case; though the consequences of a yet worse disobedience may render physicking the lesser of two evils, on occasion.

We need say nothing here of the practice of giving laudanum or other narcotics to infants, because anything that can be said has been said, aloud, solemnly, vehemently, from one end of society to the other. Where we still see an infant laid down with a flannel steeped in "cordial" stuffed into its mouth; or the bottle and spoon with baby's "sleeping mixture" on the mantel-piece, it is either where an old nurse is about to give over her office to a new generation, or where the household is sunk so low in intemperance and ignorance, that nothing can be done but through education, from the lowest point upwards. But there are still nurseries, from the tradesman's attic to the nobleman's suite of children's apartments, where quacking practices are going on, as fatal as the sleeping sop in the cellar or the gin-shop. We, ourselves, have seen ladies in silk and lace, diligently engaged in killing a baby—following their own notions—(the mother obedient to the grandmother), rubbing in calomel in large quantities, after putting some down the throat. We will not say what more we have seen, for one case is as good as ten, for purposes of warning. Some of the wisest persons we know, of both sexes, parents, doctors, nurses, and sensible observers, are of opinion that children will never grow up in full vigour and full numbers while more or less drugged. Remedies should rarely be needed; and of all remedial measures, swallowing drugs (or receiving them in any way) will hereafter be the last to be resorted to.

Brain diseases seem to be the scourge of infancy in our time; far more so than of old, when fevers and digestive disturbance seem to have prevailed. The fact is, we are all less vegetative in our habits than our forefathers were; and, whatever may be the effect on our adult bodies and minds, we ought to consider the case of the children more than we do. The racket, and wear and tear, that the human brain is subject to, in our days, before it is fully grown, may account for a large proportion of the needless mortality which is our crime and disgrace.

We all join in a shout of reprobation when we hear of the frightening of infants in the dark. We execrate the housemaid who hid herself in mamma's bed-curtains; and, just when the little child was nearly asleep, came and pinched its nose, with the hoarse information, "I'm Billy the Bo:" but yet

there are papas—great men at the bar, perhaps, or busy men at the bank—who come home after baby is gone to bed and just asleep, and who must give baby a toss before dinner. They go and snatch up baby from its first sleep, and before it knows what it is about, toss it half-way to the ceiling; or, in winter, shake it about before the flaring gas-light. We would not venture to say which is worst, Billy the Bo, or such fathers, as far as the children's brains are concerned. Then, there are the frequent journeys of our days. Formerly, young children of all ranks had the advantage, which the children of the humbler middle classes have now—of vegetating, while their nature is vegetative; of living on from month to month, and from year to year, with only such change as deepened the benefit of the stillness; sleeping in the same bed, going through the same daily routine, and being thereby more at liberty to profit by the natural changes of the seasons and of human life. The brain then grew undisturbed, the natural processes of thought went on, the powers were developed in their order, and every stage of life was fruitful in its turn. It is so now where children are reared under the guardianship of thorough good-sense.

But the exceptions to this normal rearing seem to be more numerous—perhaps during a transition state only. Among the richer classes, infants really seem to have no rest. They are whisked hither and thither by railway, without any apparent consideration of the effects of its singular accompaniments of noise and motion. There are not a few adults who feel it a hardship to have no choice of modes of travelling, if they are not rich enough to protest. The double motion of the railway carriage, the noise and swiftness, are sorely trying to many heads, stomachs, and spines: yet we see in almost every train more or fewer infants, of whom some are probably receiving fatal injury. At the age when quietness is so necessary that we can detect the bad effects of the silly practice of talking loud to infants (as to foreigners, as if they were deaf, because they cannot understand as we do), we expose the tender brain to the barbarous rumble, whizz, clatter, and screech of a railway-train. At the period when nature shuts in the little creature within the quiet enclosure of home, where it can take refuge from scaring sights and sounds in its mother's lap, we see it carried over land and sea, meeting new faces and new scenes at every turn, and going through everything but the regular habits necessary to its growth,—to the confirmation of each stage of development.

The roving life of our day is abundantly hurtful at a subsequent stage of education; but it then affects the mental and moral growth, whereas in infancy the physical frame is liable to fatal mischief from it. The youth and the girl who have travelled every year of their lives, and been carried over continent and sea in pursuit of "advantages," may, and usually do, turn out incapable of deep thought or feeling,—essentially superficial, though apparently liberal; but the little one of the family is of weak intellect, or dwarfed, or rickety, or is probably in its grave. The poorer classes suffer proportionally by Infant Schools, if we may judge by the statistics which

show the mortality from brain-disease among the infant-school population of the country. The process is much the same in the two cases. Nature is outraged in both. It may be better that the working-woman's child should be at school at three years old than setting itself on fire, or falling out of the window, or being run over in the street; but it is out of its proper place in a large room, amidst a vast assemblage of children of its own age, all making a noise, and every sense being excited for the greater part of every day. Its natural place is in a home where no two people are of the same age; where there is a certain household resemblance among them all; where all are too busy for much noise; and where there are quiet times and shady places for the repose of the sensitive little brain when it grows irritable.

It does not follow that the child itself should be quiet, except just enough for its own good. It makes one's heart ache to read of the little Brontës stepping about the house as if they trod on eggs, and speaking in whispers, and knowing no games, nor the delight of a shout. The best rebuke ever given to thoughtlessness about a child's need of lung-exercise was perhaps that given by poor Laura Bridgman, the American girl so pathetically and philosophically made known to Europe by the annual reports of her guardian, Dr. Howe. This poor child, actually bereaved of eyes and ears in early infancy, showed all the instincts of childhood as she grew up, and, among the rest, that of making a noise: but being totally deaf, her noises were harsh and troublesome. When instructed about suppressing them, the poor dumb girl asked, by her finger-signs, "Why, then, has God given me so much voice?" This was guidance. She was allowed a room for a certain time daily, where she might make all the noise she pleased. Every young child ought to have that sort of liberty for a considerable part of every day. When it begins to chatter, its lungs will have plentiful exercise: meantime its natural cries of joy and grief should have free course, except during the hours when it may be trained to be quiet. We may be disposed to pity the Quaker child in many Friends' households, set up on a high stool for a certain time daily, to learn to be perfectly still; but it is a question whether the little creature does not gain, on the whole, by the practice, if it is only left free to make itself heard all over the garden in play-hours: but the noise ought to be in proportion to the self-denial which earns it.

Not only must the lungs be exercised, if the child is to be healthy, but the senses must be put early to use, to develop the brain equally. We remember two ladies of about the same age, and in much the same position, and, moreover, acquainted with each other, who offered the most complete contrast in their way of entertaining their succession of babies; a contrast which would have been ludicrous, but for the thought of the consequences. One was a peremptory, self-confident woman, whose spirit was never dashed with a misgiving in her life, most probably. Every place where she was seemed full of glare, noise, and bustle; and her notion of baby-play, in which

she thought herself unparalleled, was praising baby in the most highfown terms, in a scream like an eagle's, shaking it like a pitch of hay on a fork, and making it the most stupendous promises in the most alarming manner. What the maturity of those babies is, we will not describe. The contrasting mother was singularly absent. She would let her baby sit doubled up on her left arm (always the same arm) for any length of time that her reverie lasted. While her large, vacant black eyes were fixed on the window-blind, and her mouth hung half-open, baby's large black eyes fixed on vacancy, and hanging jaw, presented the most absurd likeness to its mother throughout a long series. When not so niched on the arm, the child was on the carpet,—put down like a bag of meal,—and supplied with a bunch of keys, which it jingled till somebody came to take it up again. Dull as ditch-water, dry as chaff, were the minds so left undeveloped; and the bodily state was something between health and disease. It is only through the sweet and merry entertainment of exercising the eyes on colours, forms, and objects, and the ears among natural sounds, and the touch on all substances that come in the way, that the highest health can be attained,—the elastic, inexhaustible energy which grows out of an active and well-amused mind, during its period of abode among the senses.

These things are overlooked by many who are aware of the necessity of exercising the limbs; but how great is the number of mothers and nursemaids who do not perceive even the latter necessity, the prevalence of perambulators may indicate. We hope these vehicles have been sufficiently abused. Deaths of infants by sun-stroke in the Park this summer, are a pretty strong warning; and attention has been directed by all conceivable means to the blue lips, rolling eyes, and dead countenances of infants wheeled through the wind and frost in mid-winter,—their bodies torpid, their limbs cramped, their sensations those of dull misery; so that we may hope that the pile of coffins for victims of a practice liable to so much abuse may not be destined to grow much larger.

What in the world is easier than to let nature show what the child ought to do with its limbs? Give the little creature space and liberty, and encouragement to tumble about, and see what it will do. A soft ball, cunningly rolled, is enough to set an infant using all its powers till it is tired, when it will be still. It will get up when it is able to stand: it will pass from one chair to another when it is able to walk; and nothing but mischief can come of interfering,—mischief in the form of bow-legs or crooked ankles, and infinite distress to the child.

And thus it is through the whole course of infant life. The machine will go very well if its works are not tampered with or obstructed. In the child's first walks across the room, we let it take its own path, only watching to remove obstructions, and to prevent a fall: and just such should be the course of the little creature's progress in life. It will do all that it ought to do at the right time, if it is only left unstinted in the requisites of health—good air, wholesome food,

warmth and cleanliness, and tender intercourse. Sensible women say there is nothing easier than managing children, body and mind, if good sense is brought to the task. You may wind them round your finger; you may make anything of them, in regard to moral habits, simply by letting nature have her perfect work, free from perversion by anxiety, carelessness, or passion. Sensible doctors say the same as to the bodily growth, supposing the child is born healthy. The natural course of things is, that every infant born free from disease and imperfection, should at five years old be a creature full of promise—erect, intelligent, active, inquisitive, manifesting in little all the qualities which contribute to compose a true manhood or womanhood. Instead of this, what do we see? The most distressing after-dinner incident we ever witnessed was this: A man of literary eminence—a family man, a man of the tenderest heart and most delicate feelings—was dining with some old acquaintance after a long term of foreign travel. Two other guests were present. After dinner, the door opened, and a weakly, tottering, dismal-looking little girl of three entered silently, and was silently taken upon mamma's lap. The returned traveller studied her for a moment, and then said, "Come, you are all very well; but where are the rest?" The rest, six others, were all in their graves!

So, if we would summon the family of English infants by the hundred born on the same day, what should we see? Perhaps twenty would appear in perfect bloom, true towards nature, and dressed in her strength and beauty. Forty more might follow, whose parents are looking forward to the proper threescore years and ten for them. Some few, perhaps, may be mournfully regarded as destined for a short career; but no thoughtless observer would guess the smallness of the chance that most of the group have of completing the course of human life. Many will die soon, and few late. Unaware of the hidden signs or sources of disease, and satisfied with a low average of health, the spectator may say, "This is all very well; but where are the rest?" The rest are gone, and will be no more seen. Those forty out of the hundred have undergone, in the mass, a hell of suffering. Those tender little creatures, so sensitive to pain, yet so tenacious of life, have passed through the fire to Moloch. Their moans and shrieks, as the fire of disease consumed them, will never die out of our ears. "Oh! it is hard to see a child die!" exclaimed a fond father, who saw his two infants die in one week. It is hard, when all has been done that lies in the power of man or woman, first to guard and then to save. But of these forty in the hundred, there are scarcely any which are not cases of murder—of such murder as occasionally shocks society as having happened in a lunatic asylum. One does not blame anybody; but it is a dreadful catastrophe, which must be taken as a warning to permit no more. So it is with this great company of children, killed by misadventure. The great point is, that the perpetration is henceforth to be considered as either crime or lunacy. How long shall it be witnessed without resistance?

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